

DON'T DISREGARD THE SEED

Establishing Personal and Communal Resilience Through Biblical Stewardship

John Davis Perry, II

Primary Text: Proverbs 20:4

Governing Question:

What are we doing today with what may be necessary for tomorrow?

Central Truth:

Resilience is developed by how we steward what is available before difficulty arrives.

INTRODUCTION:

Life has a way of throwing us into the midst of unexpected demand.

And in those moments, we generally discover one of two realities:

Either we are prepared, or we are not.

The moment of demand does not create capacity. **It reveals the capacity we have already developed.**

When life suddenly requires wisdom, we must respond from the wisdom we have developed. When financial pressure comes, we respond from whatever financial capacity has been established. When emotional pressure rises, we respond from whatever emotional maturity we possess. When spiritual adversity arrives, we respond from whatever spiritual depth has already been formed.

That is why resilience is more than recovering after something happens.

Resilience also concerns what we develop **before the moment arrives.**

In that sense, resilience requires us to become **response-able**—capable of supplying an appropriate response when life makes a demand.

And Scripture teaches that this ability is often determined by how we manage the season we are presently in.

Proverbs 20:4 says:

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.”

What makes this proverb disturbing is that his problem does not begin in harvest.

His problem begins when he refuses to properly manage planting season.

Harvest simply exposes it.

That brings us to the issue before us:

What happens when we disregard the seed entrusted to our present because we fail to recognize its relationship to our future?

I. “THE SLUGGARD WILL NOT PLOW”

He neglects what the present season requires.

The first thing Proverbs tells us is surprisingly simple:

There is something he should be doing that he refuses to do.

He has arrived at a season in which plowing is required.

The field is available.

The opportunity exists.

But the necessary work remains undone.

This is important because irresponsibility is not always revealed by doing something destructive. Sometimes irresponsibility is simply **failing to do what the season requires.**

James 4:17 gives biblical support to this principle:

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

The sluggard does not have to destroy the field.

He only has to leave it uncultivated.

That principle reaches far beyond agriculture.

Financial capacity can remain undeveloped because we continually postpone discipline.

Spiritual maturity can remain undeveloped because we repeatedly postpone obedience.

Knowledge can remain undeveloped because we hear but never apply.

Relationships can remain undeveloped because we assume there will always be more time to nurture them.

Leadership can remain undeveloped because we enjoy the people who are serving now without preparing anyone for what comes next.

Nothing dramatic has to happen.

Something necessary simply has to remain undone long enough.

Insight:

The sluggard fails to recognize that **the present contains responsibility.**

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reinforces the reality that life unfolds within divinely permitted seasons:

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

The issue is not merely that seasons exist.

Wisdom requires us to recognize **what responsibility belongs to the season we are in.**

We often think of today primarily in terms of what it gives us.

Scripture forces us to consider what today requires from us.

Teaching Principle:

You cannot develop tomorrow’s capacity while continually neglecting today’s responsibility.

The first question, therefore, is:

What is this season requiring me to cultivate?

II. “BY REASON OF THE COLD”

He allows present conditions to overrule future responsibility.

Proverbs does not merely tell us that the sluggard refuses to plow.

It tells us why.

“By reason of the cold.”

He has an explanation.

And that matters.

The text does not require us to assume that the cold is imaginary.

The conditions may genuinely be uncomfortable.

The problem is not that he notices the conditions.

The problem is that **he allows the conditions to determine whether he will fulfill the responsibility.**

Ecclesiastes 11:4 gives us a striking parallel:

“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”

The issue is not awareness of conditions.

The issue is allowing imperfect conditions to become a permanent excuse for inaction.

This exposes something deeper about the sluggard.

His problem is not merely laziness.

His reasoning is defective.

He places greater value on avoiding present discomfort than on preparing for future necessity.

That is how seed gets disregarded.

The future value of what we possess becomes less important than what we presently feel.

We know we should save, but spending feels better now.

We know we should develop discipline, but comfort feels better now.

We know we should apply what we are learning, but application requires work.

We know a difficult conversation needs to happen, but avoidance feels easier.

We know something must be developed, but the cost is immediate while the benefit appears distant.

And this is where resilience can quietly be lost.

Present comfort can become expensive when it repeatedly overrides future responsibility.

Insight:

The sluggard gives **what he feels now authority over what he will need later.**

Hebrews 12:11 supports this principle of accepting present discipline for future benefit:

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

The biblical pattern is clear:

Some things that are profitable later are uncomfortable now.

That is why we cannot evaluate responsible action merely by present sensation.

Teaching Principle:

Resilience requires the maturity to endure necessary discomfort in the present so that we develop needed capacity for the future.

III. HE FAILS TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF THE SEASON

He treats planting time as though it has no relationship to harvest.

The sluggard's problem becomes even clearer when we consider the agricultural picture.

Plowing season does not look like harvest.

During plowing, there is no visible crop.

There is no abundance to gather.

There is no immediate reward.

There is work being performed for something that does not yet exist.

That requires a particular kind of reasoning.

You must believe that what you do **now** has implications for what becomes possible **later**.

Galatians 6:7 makes that relationship explicit:

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Paul is dealing with a broader spiritual principle, but the agricultural logic is the same:

Present sowing and future reaping are connected.

The sluggard fails to think that way.

He evaluates planting season primarily by its present conditions instead of its future possibilities.

The cold is obvious.

The harvest is not.

The inconvenience is present.

The consequence is distant.

And when a person cannot see beyond the immediate moment, seed becomes easy to disregard.

This is the danger of disregarding seed.

Seed rarely looks as valuable as harvest.

Seed is small.

Harvest is visible.

Seed represents potential.

Harvest represents realization.

Seed requires patience.

Harvest provides reward.

Yet Jesus Himself uses the nature of seed to demonstrate that what appears small in the present can contain consequences far beyond its present appearance:

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

— John 12:24

The immediate context concerns Jesus’ death, so we should not detach the verse from its Christological meaning. But the agricultural reality Jesus uses remains clear: **seed possesses productive potential that is only realized when it is surrendered to its proper process.**

This helps us understand why some of the most valuable things in our lives do not initially look valuable.

A lesson may not look like future wisdom.

A small amount of money may not look like future stability.

An ordinary discipline may not look like future strength.

An uncomfortable experience may not look like future maturity.

An emerging leader may not look like future organizational stability.

But seed is not evaluated merely by what it is.

Seed must also be evaluated by what it can become.

Teaching Principle:

Wisdom recognizes future value before future value becomes visible.

The sluggard cannot do that.

And because he cannot properly value the season, he fails to properly steward what the season makes possible.

IV. “THEREFORE”

The future consequence is connected to the present decision.

There is one word in Proverbs 20:4 that cannot be overlooked:

“Therefore.”

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; **therefore** shall he beg in harvest...”

That word establishes a relationship.

Harvest does not suddenly become difficult for no reason.

What happens later is connected to what happened earlier.

Galatians 6:9 reinforces the same sowing-and-reaping structure:

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

Notice the language:

“In due season.”

There is often distance between responsible action and visible result.

That distance is what makes both discipline and neglect deceptive.

The sluggard refuses to plow today.

Nothing happens immediately.

He does not become hungry that afternoon.

There is no immediate catastrophe.

For a while, his decision may appear harmless.

And that delay creates deception.

Because when negative consequences do not arrive immediately, we can begin believing our choices do not matter.

But the field is already recording the decision.

The harvest will eventually tell the truth.

Numbers 32:23 gives another biblical warning concerning delayed exposure:

“Be sure your sin will find you out.”

The principle is not that every delayed consequence is divine punishment. The principle is that **delay does not erase reality**.

The absence of immediate exposure does not mean the underlying condition does not exist.

You can neglect your spiritual development and still function today.

You can neglect your finances and still pay today's bills.

You can neglect important relationships and still communicate.

You can neglect leadership development while current leaders remain available.

You can keep repeating the same mistake while circumstances remain forgiving.

The absence of immediate collapse does not mean the present pattern is sustainable.

A critical distinction

This does **not** mean every hardship is caused by earlier irresponsibility.

Scripture clearly recognizes suffering, injustice, sickness, tragedy, oppression, and circumstances outside human control.

But Proverbs 20:4 requires us to acknowledge another category:

Some vulnerability is avoidable.

Sometimes tomorrow is difficult because yesterday contained an opportunity to develop something that we disregarded.

Teaching Principle:

Delayed consequences do not mean absent consequences.

Sometimes the future simply reveals what the present has been producing all along.

V. “HE SHALL BEG IN HARVEST, AND HAVE NOTHING”

Harvest reveals diminished response capacity.

Now we finally reach harvest.

Notice what has changed.

Earlier, the sluggard had a field.

He had opportunity.

He had time.

He had a season in which something could be developed.

Now he has a need.

But he no longer possesses the capacity to supply what the moment requires.

This brings us directly back to resilience.

The moment of demand does not create capacity. It reveals the capacity we have already developed.

Jesus expresses a related principle in Matthew 25:8–9 through the parable of the ten virgins.

When the unexpected moment arrives, the foolish virgins discover that necessary preparation cannot simply be transferred or manufactured at the moment of demand.

Their request is:

“Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.”

But the moment requiring preparation has already arrived.

The parable is specifically about readiness for the coming of the bridegroom, but its logic reinforces the principle before us:

Some forms of preparedness must exist before the moment in which they are required.

Harvest makes a demand upon the sluggard.

He needs provision.

But the capacity needed at harvest had to be developed during planting.

That is why his failure is more serious than simply “having nothing.”

He has lost **response ability**.

He cannot supply what the moment requires from his own developed capacity.

The text says he must now beg.

That means the person who once possessed an opportunity to participate in producing what he would need has become dependent upon someone else’s preparation.

This applies beyond the individual.

Paul tells Timothy:

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

— 2 Timothy 2:2

That is communal resilience.

Paul does not wait for the next generation of leadership to be needed before instructing Timothy to develop it.

Capacity is intentionally transferred **before the vacancy exists**.

The principle applies to families.

It applies to churches.

It applies to organizations.

It applies to communities.

A resilient church develops leaders before vacancies appear.

A resilient family develops financial and relational capacity before crisis arrives.

A resilient believer develops spiritual discipline before adversity requires it.

A resilient community develops relationships, knowledge, institutions, and people before emergency exposes their absence.

Teaching Principle:

Tomorrow's demand may require capacity that can only be developed today.

That is why seed must not be disregarded.

CONCLUSION: DON'T DISREGARD THE SEED

Proverbs 20:4 gives us the entire progression.

There is a responsibility:

He should plow.

There is resistance:

The conditions are uncomfortable.

There is faulty reasoning:

Present discomfort becomes more important than future responsibility.

There is delay:

Nothing immediately appears to happen.

There is a season change:

Harvest arrives.

There is exposure:

The capacity he needs was never developed.

That is the anatomy of the sluggard.

And it gives us a critical picture of resilience.

Resilience does not begin when difficulty arrives.

Resilience is being built—or neglected—long before difficulty appears.

So the question is not simply:

What am I facing today?

The deeper question is:

What is today giving me an opportunity and responsibility to develop for tomorrow?

What knowledge must become wisdom?

What discipline must become habit?

What financial resource must become capacity?

What experience must become maturity?

What spiritual truth must become practiced obedience?

What person must be developed?

What seed has been placed in our hands whose true value will not become visible until another season?

Because eventually harvest comes.

And when it does:

The moment of demand will not create capacity. It will reveal what we developed while we still had the opportunity.